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Research Study

The Soviet-Palestinian Connection Since the October 1973 War

NSA review completed

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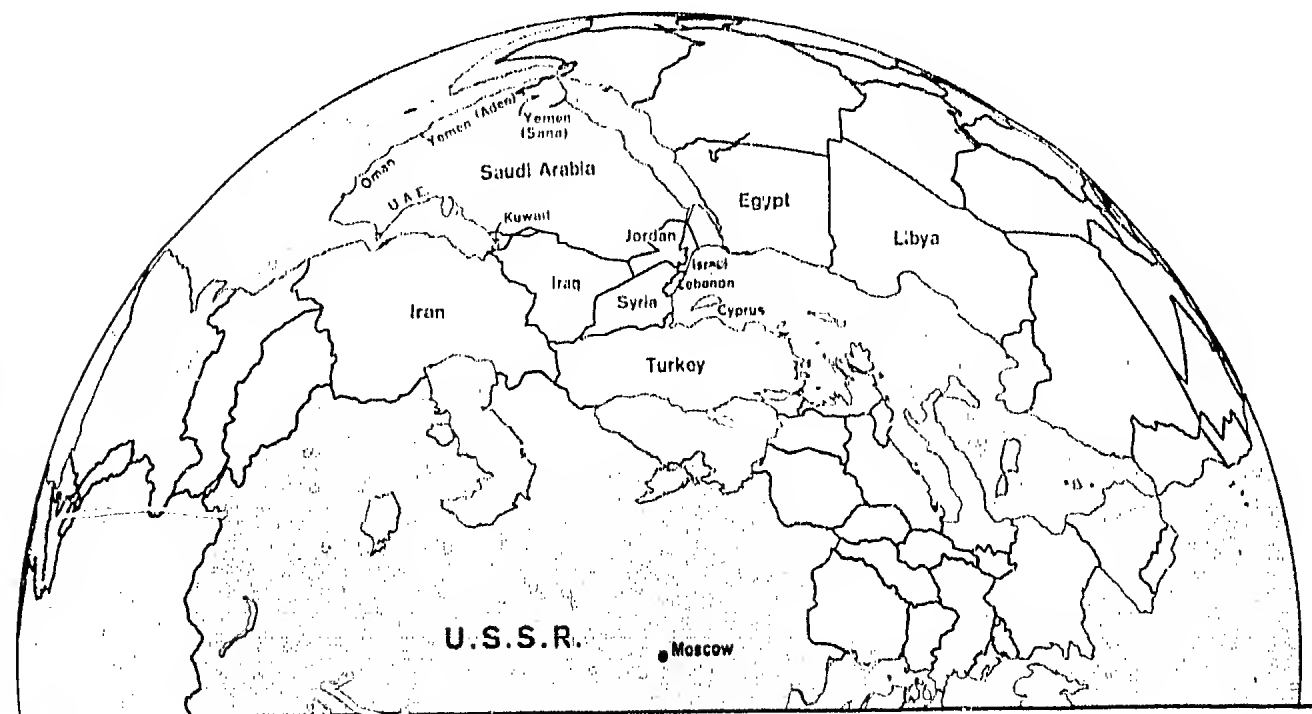
CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE
OFFICE OF POLITICAL RESEARCH

THE SOVIET-PALESTINIAN CONNECTION
SINCE THE OCTOBER 1973 WAR

APRIL 1975

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The Middle East from Moscow

NOTE

In the preparation of this study, the Office of Political Research consulted other offices of the Central Intelligence Agency. Their comments and suggestions were appreciated and used, but no formal attempt at coordination was undertaken. In general, the paper is geared to the reader with background knowledge of both the Middle East and the USSR. For those interested, however, a brief glossary of key Palestinian groups mentioned in the paper attached. The cutoff date on information contained in the paper is 31 March 1975. Comments would be welcomed by the author,

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Figure 2.

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PRINCIPAL JUDGMENTS

Since the October 1973 war, the Soviets have made recurrent use of the Palestinian issue to try to obstruct US-sponsored partial steps toward a Middle East settlement. Moscow has reasoned that Soviet support for the Palestinians, as well as for Arab states more militant than Egypt, could help to

- *Compensate for the political losses the USSR was sustaining in Egypt;*
- *Demonstrate to the Egyptians the importance of Soviet aid;*
- *Pressure Egypt away from the US and back towards the USSR;*
- *Frustrate US-backed talks and refocus attention on Geneva.*

The Palestinians themselves have the ability to disrupt peace talks in several ways. They can increase tension and contribute to heightened Israeli intransigence by engaging in anti-Israeli terrorist attacks abroad or in cross-border operations from Lebanon. They can also undermine those Arabs (above all, the Egyptians) who are willing to negotiate separate agreements by accusing them of abandoning the emotionally charged Palestinian cause. Egypt, reluctant to become isolated from most Arab opinion on this issue, has been sensitive to such criticism and, on occasion, has modified its policies accordingly.

The Soviets have used this potential Palestinian leverage to reinforce their policy towards Egypt, asserting that pursuit of disengagement talks signifies abandonment of the Palestinian cause. In addition, they have increased their political ties to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), thereby increasing the organization's independence and ability to take a stand against Egyptian policies.

Various factors have contributed to closer Soviet-Palestinian relations:

- *The PLO shares Soviet suspicions of Sadat's pursuit of US-backed disengagement talks.*

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- *The Soviets hope to capitalize on support for the potentially successful Palestinian movement and insure their influence in any future Palestinian state.*
 - *The Palestinians want to broaden their base of financial and military aid and acquire international recognition.*

At the same time, there remain limits to the extent of Soviet-PLO cooperation:

- *The Soviets have not wanted to go farther than the Syrians in supporting Palestinian positions; Syria's ambivalence towards disengagement talks, and thus towards PLO obstruction of such talks, has inhibited Soviet endorsement of Palestinian positions.*
- *The Soviet desire to move to Geneva similarly limits the extent of its backing for obstructionist positions.*
- *The Soviet Union recognizes Israel's right to exist; the PLO does not and its platform calls for the establishment of a secular state in all of Palestine, including what is now Israel proper.*
- *Soviet enthusiasm is tempered by lack of unity within the PLO, Soviet distrust of PLO leader Arafat, and the absence of a Palestinian-owned territorial base.*

While being careful not to move too quickly, the Soviets have gradually improved relations with the PLO since the war. They have expanded the number and level of contacts, increased propaganda support, and promised more military aid.

At the same time, the Soviets have forged closer ties to the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDFLP), a Marxist-Leninist group within the PLO which Moscow hopes will gain strength and possibly form the basis for a leftist coalition in a future Palestinian state. This support has already paid off, as the PDFLP's leader, Naif Hawatmah, has become increasingly vocal in opposition to Egypt's negotiating policies. In addition, cooperation between the PDFLP and the Soviets has given each new leverage in dealing with Arafat.

In the past year, the Soviets have moved from support of the Palestinians' "legitimate rights" (a vague term) to Gromyko's February 1975 endorsement of the Palestinians' right to create their own state. This shift has mirrored the evolution of Soviet policy toward backing the establishment of a Palestinian state on the West Bank of the Jordan and in Gaza, territories occupied by Israel in 1967.

The Soviets have used the impasse over negotiating Israel's return of the West Bank to Arab control as a primary instrument in their efforts to prevent further US-contrived disengagement agreements with Egypt and Syria. The solution to the West Bank problem has been complicated by Israel's refusal to negotiate with the PLO as well as by conflicting Jordanian and PLO claims to speak for the West Bank. The Soviets have contributed to this impasse by

- *Backing Arab forces which have insisted on a unified Arab approach to negotiations;*
- *Encouraging stalemate on the West Bank issue by supporting Palestinian rejection of Egyptian efforts to reconcile Jordan and the PLO.*

While anxious to move Middle East negotiations to Geneva, the Soviets have nevertheless on occasion seemed willing to injure Geneva prospects if that was the price required to scuttle US-backed disengagement efforts. The USSR thus appears still to consider a state of continued tension in the area preferable, in the last analysis, to a peace arranged primarily under US auspices.

The course of events most preferred by the Soviets, however, has been a failure in disengagement talks, as has now occurred, followed by a reconvening of the Geneva Conference, where they will share with the US the status and prestige involved in mediation. They undoubtedly expect that the US will bear the onus for the failure of the conference should Israel refuse either to talk to the PLO or to withdraw from territories occupied in 1967 as required by UN Resolutions 242 and 338 on which the conference is based.

Soviet use of the Palestinian issue to frustrate any further US Middle East initiatives can be anticipated. On the other hand, the Soviets can be expected to modify their backing for Palestinian positions when further obstruction appears unnecessary or counterproductive. With the failure of the March 1975 round of disengagement talks, Moscow may well push for a compromise on the question of PLO representation at Geneva; recent Soviet efforts to encourage Jordanian attendance at the conference suggest that this is in fact happening.

Meanwhile, the Soviets will probably continue to provide material and moral assistance to the Palestinians no matter what happens in any future disengagement talks or at Geneva. The Palestinian, whether stateless or established on the West Bank, will remain a source of ten-

[REDACTED]

sion in the Middle East and therefore a continuing object of Soviet attention and assistance. The Soviets undoubtedly envision a future Palestinian state, squeezed between a hostile Israel and a suspicious Jordan, as a logical recipient of Soviet assistance—and therefore a useful client in the area. They will therefore continue to back formation of a Palestinian state on the West Bank and in Gaza.

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THE DISCUSSION

Since the Arab-Israeli war in October 1973, the Soviets have increased their backing for Palestinian positions and promised more material assistance to the movement. This policy has developed within the context of continued Soviet frustration both at being excluded from peace negotiations and at worsening Soviet-Egyptian relations. While the Soviets and Palestinians have discovered a wider area of common interest, their relationship has remained limited for a variety of reasons. This paper discusses the factors affecting the developing relationship, Soviet efforts to use the Palestinians to advance their position in the Middle East, and potential Soviet positions on such issues as the nature of a future Palestinian state—its borders, political composition and ties, and its use as a base of operations against Israel.

I. FACTORS AFFECTING SOVIET POLICY TOWARDS PALESTINIANS

A. The Frustration of Soviet Postwar Expectations

In the wake of the October war, the Soviets clearly hoped to play a major role in the peacemaking—on an equal basis with the US. These expectations were soon disappointed; the USSR was excluded from the exchanges which led to the cease-fire stabilization agreement in November 1973 and to the US-mediated Israeli-Egyptian and Israeli-Syrian disengagement accords of January and May 1974, respectively. The Geneva multinational peace conference, where the USSR, as co-chairman with the US, expected to see its status as a permanent power in the Middle East formalized, had not become the focal point of diplomatic action.

Frustrated by their diplomatic impotence, the Soviets were particularly troubled by the attitude of the Egyptians, who plainly wanted to keep Mos-

cow out of the postwar negotiations and bore a large part of the responsibility for doing so. The Egyptians believed that they would be better off to follow the US rather than the Soviet lead. They were also eager to ease the minds, and the purse-strings, of the anti-Soviet Saudi Arabians. The Soviet-Egyptian relationship, which had never recovered from the expulsion of Soviet personnel in 1972, thus came under new strain. The Soviets added to these tensions by failing to replace the equipment lost by Egypt in the October war.

The anticipation of serious peace negotiations after the war forced renewed recognition of the Palestinian issue as a major impediment to a general settlement in the area. This did not lead to any immediate shift in the USSR's approach to the Palestinians or their main organization, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). For a time, Soviet attention remained focused on more immediate goals—assertion of a role in stabilizing the cease-fire and promotion of the Geneva peace conference.

However, as their concern with the course of postwar events intensified and their disillusionment with Egypt deepened, the Soviets undertook efforts to broaden and fortify their position in the Middle East. They strengthened relations with other Arab states (Syria, Iraq, and Libya) and gave increased recognition to the Palestinians. This policy, aimed both at covering the loss of influence they were sustaining in Egypt and putting pressure on Egypt to change its policies, placed the Soviets in a somewhat ambivalent position. For tactical reasons, they were moving closer to regimes (specifically Iraq and Libya) whose extremist views on Israel and Palestine they did not endorse. The resulting contradictions have imposed greater ambiguity on Soviet policy.

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B. Mutual Inducements to Close Ties

Several factors have contributed to the growing friendship between the Soviets and the PLO since the war. Most importantly, both have had an *interest in seeing the US-backed piecemeal approach to Middle East negotiations fail*. The Soviets resented their exclusion from the negotiating process itself. The Palestinians* have been consistently suspicious of the basic approach, fearing their own exclusion from the benefits of any resulting agreements. While opposed to bilateral deals with Israel by Egypt and Syria, they have particularly rejected any Jordanian role in negotiations for return of the West Bank. They despise and distrust Husayn, who undertook the September 1970 crackdown on the fedayeen (Palestinian commandos) in Jordan. They are also suspicious of Sadat, believing that he would abandon their cause willingly if the deal were good for Egypt and politically tenable for him. What they want is a unified Arab approach to a total Middle East settlement in which the Palestinian question would have to be addressed. In general, therefore, they support the Soviet-backed calls for convocation of a multinational conference at Geneva.**

By bolstering the Palestinian movement and positions, the Soviets have increased the capacity of the Palestinians to undermine disengagement talks. The Palestinians can disrupt such negotiations in several ways. Most obviously, by engaging in anti-Israeli terrorist acts abroad or in cross-border attacks from South Lebanon, they can increase tension and heighten general Israeli intransigence. In addition, they can put pressure on those Arabs (above all, the Egyptians), who are willing to negotiate with Israel, by accusing them of abandoning the emotionally-charged Palestinian cause. Because Egypt does not want to see its prestige and position in the Arab world weakened, it has felt vulnerable to such criticism and has accordingly felt it necessary to restrict the political concessions offered to Israel in exchange for further Sinai withdrawals. Finally, the

*The term *Palestinians*, unless otherwise specified, will refer to moderate Palestinian elements, rather than the most intransigent elements typified by the *Rejection Front*.

**They also have problems with this approach, however, as its basis is UN Resolutions 242 and 338, which assume acceptance of Israel's existence.

Palestinians can advocate and gain backing for positions of their own which impede negotiations. This was the case with PLO claims to be the sole spokesman for all Palestinians; by eliminating Jordan as the Arab negotiator for the West Bank, the PLO destroyed chances for a disengagement there.

The Soviets have taken advantage of these issues in their own efforts to thwart disengagement talks. They have themselves argued that pursuit of such negotiations means abandonment of the Palestinian cause, thus reinforcing pressure on the Egyptians. In addition, by strengthening Moscow's own political ties to the PLO, the USSR has increased the organization's independence and ability to take a stand against Egyptian policies. Thus, by improving their bilateral relations, the Soviets and Palestinians have been able to put pressure on the Egyptians to moderate their US-oriented approach; to the extent that this has succeeded, both have benefited.

Both the Soviets and the PLO have had additional motivations for improving relations. As the issue of establishment of a Palestinian state has come into sharper focus and the PLO has gained increased status in both the Arab world and the international community, *Soviet interest in backing a potentially winning cause* has intensified, since the Soviets want to insure *influence in a future Palestinian entity*. In addition, they hope to maintain their credentials with other Arab states which back Palestinian demands and to gain the recognition and credit from pro-Arab, Third-World forces which might accrue from supporting the cause.

The Palestinians, for their part, have been anxious for alternate sources of *financial and military aid* and have naturally hoped for increased Soviet assistance. In addition, as they have begun to emerge on the international scene, particularly in US and pre-Geneva maneuverings, they have been looking for ways to enhance their status and have thus been eager to improve relations with the Soviet Union and with East European countries as well.

In addition to these inducements to cooperation, the Soviets and Palestinians share a desire to retain and reforge ties to Egypt. The Soviets still have a substantial investment in Egypt, despite the setbacks of the past years. They have poured large

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quantities of financial and military aid into the country and presumably would like to salvage what they can. They want to maintain their Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, which is at least symbolic of continued influence, and to retain important port privileges in Egypt. And they anticipate that the Egyptians will be forced to turn back to them if and when Sadat's expectations of US assistance are frustrated.

The PLO also has an interest in preserving relations with Egypt. The organization was created by Egypt and has historically been responsive to Egyptian wishes. In addition, the PLO has received its main financial assistance from conservative Arab nations (Saudi Arabia and Kuwait) which have generally approved the Egyptian approach to negotiations. PLO Executive Committee Chairman Yasir Arafat has felt reluctant to alienate these nations—for political as well as financial reasons.* His orientation is towards the moderate side of the Arab political spectrum and, should he lose Egyptian backing, he would become more vulnerable to pressures from radical Palestinian groups, backed by the militant Arab states. Furthermore, the moderate Palestinians believe that if they are to make political gains through negotiation they must do so in conjunction with Egypt. And, finally, they anticipate that the future of any Palestinian state will depend on the goodwill of Egypt. Thus, both Soviets and Palestinians have an interest in not pushing Sadat so hard that they precipitate a total breakdown in relations.

C. Areas of Difference

The inducements to a closer Soviet-Palestinian relationship are balanced by a number of obstacles to closer ties. Perhaps of most importance have been the severe *limitations on Soviet ability to influence the Palestinian movement*. This near-impotence, evident since the late 1960's, is in turn the result of several factors. First, the man and the faction which

*However, even before the death of King Faysal in March 1975, there were strains in Saudi-PLO relations. Should such strains intensify under the new Saudi leadership, PLO vulnerability to pressures from the more intransigent fedayeen would increase.



Figure 3. Yasir Arafat, PLO Head

have emerged dominant in the PLO, Yasir Arafat and his organization, Fatah, have had long-standing ties to conservative Arab forces and have not been attracted to the Soviet Union save as a source of financial and military assistance. They have ignored repeated Soviet petitions to adopt a comprehensive social and political platform which the USSR could endorse. In addition, Soviet efforts to persuade the PLO to become a unified movement have been thwarted by the lack of cohesion within the PLO itself. The organization is composed of disparate, competitive factions with diverse ideological orientations and different political allegiances.

Soviet frustration with the divisions within the Palestinian movement has been frequently expressed and has tempered Moscow's enthusiasm for supporting the movement and providing it with military aid. The Soviets have considered both the PLO's organization and objectives vague and as a result have been uncertain about how assistance would be used. In addition, various Soviet clients among the

Arab states have backed different PLO factions, making a commitment to any one faction difficult.*

Another impediment to close Soviet-Palestinian relations has been the USSR's *continuing recognition of Israel's right to exist*. The Soviets have also supported UN Resolutions 242 (November 1967) and 338 (October 1973), which are based on Israel's existence within secure borders; the Palestinians accept neither resolution. This gap in basic outlook stands in the way of a full Soviet-Palestinian entente.

In addition, the PLO's endorsement and use of *international terror* have presented problems for the Soviets for some time.

their concern that identification with those engaged in terrorist acts could prove embarrassing was a barrier to closer ties.

*For example, *Fatah*, the largest group within the *Palestinian Liberation Organization*, has received substantial aid from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait as well as some support from Syria and Egypt. The second-largest group, *Saiqa*, is a creation of the Syrian government. The Marxist-Leninist *Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDPF)* has received most of its money and training through the PLO, although it reportedly began receiving arms from Libya in late 1974. More militant Palestinian groups have joined since the war in a so-called *Rejection Front* which condemns Arafat's efforts to find a political solution based on return of the West Bank and Gaza and calls for continued struggle until all of Palestine is retrieved. They have received support from Libya and Iraq. These groups include the *Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)*, the *Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine--General Command (PFLP-GC)*, and the *Arab Liberation Front (ALF)*, a creation of Iraq.

In recent months the PLO moderates, in their quest for international recognition and respectability, have begun to denounce terrorist acts of international scope which they feel hamper their efforts. The result has been to reduce the friction between the Soviets and the PLO on this particular issue and to separate the Soviets even more from those radical Palestinian factions which still advocate and use such methods.

The Soviets have also tended to keep some distance between themselves and the PLO because of concern that an over-commitment might jeopardize the Geneva conference. Total endorsement of the PLO's claim to be the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinians would tend to weaken the Soviet ability to push for either a unified Arab delegation (including PLO representatives) or Jordanian representation of the Palestinians at Geneva. If the Israelis continue to refuse to negotiate with the PLO and the PLO refuses to recognize Israel, the elimination of the above options could undermine prospects for the Geneva talks.

D. The Shifting and Conflicting Goals of Arab Clients

Moscow's relations with the various Arab nations have a constant bearing on Soviet policy toward the Palestinians. As indicated earlier, there has been a close connection between Soviet postwar relations with Egypt and Soviet policy towards the Palestinians. Periods of pronounced deterioration in Soviet-Egyptian relations have consistently been accompanied by Soviet efforts to demonstrate stronger ties to the PLO in order to put pressure on Egypt. Similarly, during periods of improved prospects for Soviet-Egyptian ties, the Soviets have moderated their support for the Palestine cause.

As Soviet-Egyptian relations deteriorated after the October war, Syria became the main recipient of Soviet attention. Replacement of Syrian arms and postponement of loan repayments resulted from Soviet hopes that some of the advantages threatened or lost in Egypt—e.g., use of port facilities, a military presence, political cooperation—could be partially recouped in Syria. By reinforcing their pres-

ence in Syria, the Soviets also expected to counter increased US influence in Egypt and impress upon the Egyptians the utility of the Soviet connection. In doing so, the Soviets bound themselves closer to the aims of Syrian policy.

The Syrian attitude toward disengagement has fluctuated since the war. While ostensibly hostile to the concept and committed to a general settlement, the Syrians did participate in a disengagement agreement with Israel in May 1974. Various factors influence the Syrian position at a given time, including the state of tension with Israel, internal pressure on President Asad, and Syrian perceptions of the likelihood of an agreement beneficial to Syria. For example, in the early summer of 1974, when movement toward disengagement on all three fronts seemed possible and military tension with Israel was low, the Syrians seemed receptive to proceeding with piecemeal talks. On the other hand, in the late summer and fall of 1974, when tension on the Syrian-Israeli border was high and it seemed likely that progress would be made only on the Egyptian front, the Syrian position on disengagement talks hardened.

This Syrian ambivalence towards disengagement negotiations has been paralleled by ambivalence towards the Palestinian issue. When trying to undermine Egyptian pursuit of bilateral talks, the Syrians have firmly backed the Palestinian cause and Palestinian demands, hoping that these would impede talks. By the same token, when they have perceived that they might benefit from disengagement talks, they have cooperated with Egyptian efforts to achieve moderation in Palestinian demands in order to gain PLO-Jordanian cooperation and unfreeze disengagement talks.

As will be shown below, the Soviets have tried to avoid taking a stronger stand in support of Palestinian positions than that taken by the Syrians at any given time. Their concern has been that they might be blamed for undermining chances for an agreement acceptable to Syria, thus alienating Syrians as well as Egyptians.

The Iraqi position on negotiations with Israel, whether at Geneva or not, and on the Palestine is-

sue is far more uncompromising than Syria's. As noted (see footnote on page 8), Iraq is one of the sponsors of the Rejection Front. This leaves the position of the USSR and Iraq—towards a Middle East peace in general and towards the Palestinian issue specifically—far apart. But, while the Soviets do not endorse the extreme stand taken by Baghdad and the Rejection Front, their interest in retaining close relations with Iraq has been a restraint on their freedom of action vis-a-vis the PLO, inhibiting them from complete endorsement of Arafat to the exclusion of the PFLP and other Rejection Front groups.

E. Soviet Perceptions of the US Posture

Since Soviet policy towards the Palestinians has been aimed, among other things, at frustrating US negotiating efforts and boosting Geneva prospects, the Soviets have used the issue to signal the US that Moscow's interests must be taken into account. Consequently, the policy has responded to perceived shifts in US posture. At times when the Soviets have thought the US was becoming more sympathetic to the Geneva approach and thus to Soviet involvement in negotiations, their interest in backing militant Arab elements, including the Palestinians, has declined. Thus, following the US-Soviet summit at Vladivostok in November 1974, the Soviets reportedly perceived an increased US willingness to move to Geneva; they in turn moderated their stated position on immediate PLO participation in the conference. Conversely, during certain periods of movement in disengagement talks, as in January 1975, Soviet backing for Palestinian demands has intensified.

II. THE EVOLVING SOVIET POSTURE ON PALESTINE

A. The Initial Ambiguity of Soviet Policy

Before the October 1973 war, Soviet policy towards creation of a Palestinian state was kept deliberately ambiguous. Continuing Soviet recognition of Israel's right to exist was obviously incompatible with the ultimate Palestinian objective of establishing a Palestinian state to include what is now Israel proper. But the Soviet position that the territories

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occupied by Israel in 1967 must be returned left open the possibility of a Palestinian state on the Jordan West Bank and in Gaza. During 1970 and 1971 there were several reports that the Soviets would consider creation of such a state, but the question received little attention until after the 1973 war.

Upon occasion the Soviets have also suggested that all territory accumulated by Israel since the Partition Plan of 1947 has been taken by force and has not been internationally sanctioned, thus implying that some readjustment of the 1949 borders might be in order. Articles containing this message, however, have usually treated it as an academic, rather than a topical, issue.

B. The Shift in Spring 1974

By the spring of 1974 the Soviets had decided to adjust their position on creation of a Palestinian entity and to strengthen contacts with the PLO. Their decision seems clearly to have been motivated by the deterioration in their relations with Egypt.

The Soviets were upset by Secretary Kissinger's activities and the publicity accorded US promises of economic aid to Egypt. For their part, the Egyptians were unhappy over the slowness of Soviet arms deliveries and Moscow's refusal to reschedule Egyptian military debts. An early March visit to Egypt by Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko failed to resolve these differences, and in April the Soviets cut off arms supplies to Egypt entirely and told the Egyptians that Brezhnev would not be able to accept Sadat's invitation to visit Egypt in the spring or summer.

At this time the Soviets sought to improve ties with other Arab states as well as with the Palestinians. The first overt sign of the latter was a series of meetings between Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko and Yasir Arafat in the Middle East in March and May. Gromyko was the highest-level Soviet official to have met with Arafat, and the mere fact of the meetings elevated Soviet posture towards the Palestinians.

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A shift in the Soviet propaganda line shortly after the Gromyko-Arafat meetings confirmed a Soviet move to endorse establishment of a Palestinian national entity. The standard Soviet phrase previously in use referred to Palestinian "legitimate" rights; this now increasingly gave way to the phrase "legitimate national" rights.* The latter phrase, with its implicit acceptance of territorial claims, is less ambiguous than "legitimate" which could apply equally to the right of restitution, the right of return, or territorial claims.

While thus modifying their position, the Soviets were careful to give assurances of their continued recognition of Israel's existence. Soviet officials and press articles reaffirmed that Moscow stood for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence of all Middle East states, including Israel. This attempt to maintain a balance would continue through the year; each Soviet move toward the Palestinians was accompanied by repeated statements of support for Israel's existence. Such assurances were probably aimed at calming any strong US reaction to the shifts in the Soviet position.

C. Moscow Endorses PLO Rejection of Egyptian Efforts

During the early summer of 1974 the Egyptians tried to effect a unified, compromise Arab position designed to move piecemeal negotiations with Israel forward. The specific Egyptian aim at this time was to lay the groundwork for progress on return of the Jordan West Bank to Arab control. Sadat's hope was to reconcile the opposing positions of Jordan and the Palestinians on the question

*The Soviets had previously used the phrase "national liberation" to imply support for a national Palestinian state in the fall of 1969, when Soviet Politburo members Kosygin and Shelepin both used the phrase publicly. With the decline in the strength of the Palestinian movement between late 1970 and the October war, however, these ideas were dropped, and Soviet propaganda returned to its use of "national" versus "national-liberation."

of who should speak for the West Bank, largely populated by Palestinians (and by extension, who should have authority over the territory once Israel withdrew). When the Palestinians would not be persuaded to permit Jordan to negotiate on their behalf, the Egyptian effort failed.

On 18 July, in a surprise move, Jordan's King Husayn and Sadat issued a joint statement in Alexandria, agreeing that the PLO should attend the Geneva Conference at the "appropriate stage" as an independent body and that the PLO was the "legitimate representative of the Palestinians, except the Palestinians living in the Jordanian Hashemite kingdom." The statement represented a major concession by Jordan. By leaving vague the question of who represented the Palestinians living on the West Bank, Sadat and Husayn were making a compromise offer to the PLO. Any hope that the PLO would respond in a conciliatory manner was disappointed. The statement was angrily rejected by



Figure 5. Sadat and Husayn Issue Joint Statement

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the PLO Executive Committee which declared that no Arab country had the right to speak for any section of the Palestinian people.

The Soviets were apparently surprised and somewhat confused by the Egyptian-Jordanian statement. At first they responded positively; a Soviet broadcast in Arabic on 20 July termed the statement of great importance as it moved Jordan closer to recognition of the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinians. However, following the rejection by the PLO Executive Committee, Soviet comment increasingly sided with the PLO. The Soviet attitude became even more clear in the fall, after the Syrians, at first neutral, sided with the PLO. Soviet press articles then argued that in view of Palestinian hopes for making the West Bank a part of a future state, it was important which state reigned over the territory when the Israelis left. 25X1

The Soviet position on this issue reinforced PLO rejection of a PLO-Jordanian compromise which might have permitted Jordan to negotiate a disengagement of the West Bank on behalf of the PLO. It provided clear evidence of Soviet intent to use the Palestinian issue to impede disengagement talks. It also demonstrated the Soviet policy of not going further than the Syrians in endorsing Palestinian demands.

This attempt to subvert the Egyptian design was accompanied by a further deterioration in Soviet-Egyptian relations and followed by a Soviet effort to publicize improved relations with the Palestinians. A brief effort to improve Soviet-Egyptian relations in May and June 1974 had been ended by the Soviet cancellation in July of Egyptian Foreign Minister Fahmy's trip to Moscow scheduled for that month. Shortly after the cancellation, the Soviets invited Yasir Arafat to visit Moscow. The timing of the invitation suggested a Soviet effort to signal dissatisfaction with the Egyptians. 25X1

The PLO delegation which visited Moscow from 30 July to 2 August did in fact receive a political assist

The Soviets agreed to establishment of a PLO office in Moscow,* and Arafat met with First Deputy Foreign Minister Kuznetsov and Central Committee Secretary and International Department Chief Ponomarev, higher level officials than he had seen on previous visits. 25X1

While Soviet-Palestinian relations were thus strengthened, significant differences remained. The Soviets continued to withhold formal recognition of the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people and refused to supply arms directly to the PLO. 25X1

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The Soviets could, however, demonstrate increased support for the Palestinian cause without becoming formally committed on the PLO's status. They did this by publicizing strengthened references to establishment of a future Palestinian entity. Speaking in Bulgaria on 8 September, Soviet President Podgorny maintained that the Palestinians had a sovereign right to establish their "statehood" (*gosudarstvennost'*) in one form or another. This phrase was stronger still than "legitimate national rights," as it suggested sovereignty and independence as well as territorial status and thus appeared to eliminate a West Bank Palestinian entity federated with Jordan.



Figure 6. Podgorny Endorses Palestinian Statehood

D. Soviet Qualms Emerge In Fall 1974

With the failure of Egyptian efforts to reconcile Jordan and the PLO and with US-backed disengagement talks faltering, these Soviet tactics in the late summer and fall of 1974 seemed to have been rewarded. Anticipating that Egypt would have to move back towards the USSR, the Soviets sought to stimulate the process, lifting the embargo on arms shipments in late August and re-inviting Egyptian Foreign Minister Fahmy to visit Moscow. During Fahmy's visit in October, plans were made for Brezhnev to visit Cairo in January 1975, presumably bearing promises of new arms shipments.

The Soviets clearly saw the Egyptians in retreat during this period, with good reason. Faced with not only Palestinian but general Arab rejection of the agreement Sadat had reached with Hissayn in July, Cairo had immediately proposed a quadripartite meeting of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and the PLO aimed at a further attempt at reconciling the positions of Jordan and the PLO; the PLO rejected this also. Hoping to lay the groundwork for this quadripartite session, but over Jordan's objections, the Egyptians in September hosted a tripartite conference in Cairo involving Egypt, Syria, and the PLO. The three agreed that an independent national authority would be set up on Palestinian lands freed from Israeli occupation and that the PLO was the "sole representative of the Palestinian people." Although the Egyptians professed to believe that this was not a reversal of the Alexandria agreement, it was generally considered a rejection of any Jordanian role in negotiations on the future of the West Bank. This Cairo meeting in turn set the stage for the October general Arab summit in Rabat which saw Jordan eliminated as a potential spokesman for the Palestinians.

The failure of Egyptian efforts to reconcile Jordan and the PLO was partly the result of Syrian frustration with the trend in disengagement talks. The Syrians had indicated sympathy for Egypt's efforts as late as August 1974. However, by mid-September they were concerned that Egypt would pursue its own disengagement talks and abandon them. This anxiety was reportedly reinforced by their disappointment with Secretary Kissinger's October visit to Damascus. They therefore adopted a

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tougher line designed to prevent Egypt from pursuing its own course.*

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The effect of Egypt's failure and the Rabat summit's formal endorsement of the PLO as the negotiator for return of the West Bank—a situation which Israel would not accept and to which Egypt was now bound—was to make disengagement talks more difficult. This was just what the Soviets had wanted. However, in undermining disengagement negotiations, the Rabat summit also undermined prospects for reconvening the Geneva Conference. For Israel's refusal to deal with the PLO applied to Geneva as well as to bilateral talks.

Soviet appreciation that Geneva was also threatened was suggested in a post-Rabat Moscow Radio report that the PLO would send its representatives to Geneva as members of the Jordanian delegation.

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The Soviet broadcast may have revealed a new fear that without an arrangement between Jordan and the PLO, the reconvening of the Geneva Conference had become more unlikely.

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*The hardening of the Syrian line should also be viewed in the context of increasing military tensions in the area. Fedayeen attacks into Israel and Israeli reprisal air raids on Palestinian camps in Lebanon had intensified during the summer. In August Israel engaged in maneuvers near the Syrian border, charging that Soviet arms were pouring into Syria. November saw the atmosphere deteriorate still further as Syria announced that it would not renew the mandate for the UN observer force separating Syrian and Israeli forces.

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Meanwhile, Arafat's successful appearance at the United Nations in mid-November 1974 and the subsequent resolution affirming Palestinian rights of self-determination and national independence was also a mixed blessing for Soviet policy. The Soviets had fully backed the UN resolution and duly applauded the PLO's heightened international status.*

*In their lobbying efforts, the Soviets had disagreed with Egyptian efforts to have the draft of the resolution toned down. The Egyptian aim was to make the text more palatable to the West Europeans by including some references to Israel's right to exist. Soviet Ambassador Malik urged that this not be done, asking rhetorically why the Palestinians should recognize Israel's right to exist when the Israelis do not accord this recognition to the Palestinians. The Egyptians were somewhat amused by Malik's hypocrisy, as in his own speech to the General Assembly he endorsed Israel's right to exist. The Egyptian conclusion was that Malik's objective was to discourage Western support of the resolution so that the USSR would stand out as the Palestinians' champion.



Figure 7. Arafat Addresses UN Session—November 1974

However, this new status itself created some difficulties for Moscow. Following the UN session's recognition of the PLO, various third-world countries began to recognize the organization formally; as the Soviets were not yet prepared to do this, the situation was somewhat embarrassing.

Moreover, Arafat's speech to the UN also raised problems for the USSR. Not only did Arafat not acknowledge Israel's right to exist, he called for creation of one democratic secular state in the land of Palestine—the formal and ultimate PLO objective, involving the destruction of Israel as a state. This was unsettling to the Soviets, who had become increasingly committed to a PLO which was now making public demands the Soviets did not endorse. In addition, the Soviets knew that Arafat's demands made even more remote the possibility of Israel and the PLO sitting down together at the conference table in Geneva.

Soviet press reports implied that he had called for creation of a Palestinian administration only in those territories occupied by Israel in 1967.

Such Soviet reservations about the Palestinian successes of the fall were evident during Arafat's late November visit to the USSR. The visit was arranged immediately after the UN debate, and the Soviets reportedly anticipated that it would give Brezhnev added leverage in his January visit to Egypt. Before Arafat's arrival there was widespread speculation in the Middle East that Brezhnev would meet with Arafat. This did not occur, although Arafat was received by Kosygin, putting him even further up the hierarchy than on his previous visit; but this was the extent of progress. Differences between the sides probably included Arafat's unwillingness to refer even obliquely to Israel's right to exist, continued Soviet refusal to confer diplomatic status on a PLO office in Moscow,* and the

*No PLO representation was named to Moscow until March 1975, partly because of PLO unhappiness with the non-diplomatic status of the office. There is evidence that Arafat was considerably annoyed at Soviet caution at this point.

timing and composition of a possible Palestinian government-in-exile.*

Attenuation of previous Soviet support for the PLO was demonstrated in the communique issued after Arafat's visit. Whereas in the early August communique the Soviets had endorsed PLO participation in the Geneva Conference, the November communique referred to representatives of the Arab people of Palestine—not the PLO specifically. This change may have reflected a growing Soviet awareness that until the PLO moderated its stand or some other way around the dilemma was found, prospects for the Geneva Conference were poor.

This awareness, as well as the need to take US views into account, was probably also responsible for Soviet retreat from total support of the PLO in the communique issued after the US-Soviet summit in Vladivostok in late November 1974. The communique stated that "the question of other participants" (meaning the Palestinians) in the Geneva Conference could be discussed at the conference itself, a shift away from previous Soviet insistence on PLO participation in the conference from the outset.

Finally, the modification of the Soviets' pro-PLO positions at this time also harmonized with their belief that disengagement talks had failed, a view which appeared justified as late as mid-December, when Israelis and Egyptians exchanged angry and mutually intolerable demands. In addition, following the Vladivostok summit in late November, the Soviets were reportedly persuaded that prospects for the Geneva Conference were better than before. They also felt that their relations with Egypt would improve dramatically given US failure to deliver both on promises of aid and in disengagement talks, and that Brezhnev's projected visit to Cairo in January would be triumphant. They were therefore willing to relax their policy toward the Palestinians in order to promote movement toward Geneva.

E. Renewed Soviet Movement Toward Palestinians in 1975

In December 1974 Soviet hopes were again being frustrated.

*For more on this, see page 23.



Figure B. Brezhnev Again Cancels Calra Visit—
December 1974

position so that the Egyptians would not abandon them and proceed with a disengagement involving only the Sinai. The Syrians were also anxious to improve relations with Jordan in order to gain Jordan's military cooperation in the event of renewed hostilities. Neither the USSR nor Syria was prepared, however, to pressure the PLO into such cooperation.

Although this Egyptian attempt to promote movement on the West Bank failed, the Egyptians proceeded with Sinai disengagement efforts. In late January it was announced that Secretary Kissinger would visit the Middle East in February. Syria and the PLO became increasingly concerned that Egypt would reach an agreement without them, and Soviet press comments capitalized on this concern by charging that Israel's efforts to engage in bilateral talks were aimed at undermining Arab unity and depriving the PLO of unified Arab support.

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a 7 January *Le Monde* interview in which Arafat had accused certain Arab countries of participating in US-Zionist intrigues aimed at torpedoing the Geneva Conference and carrying out a "phased" negotiation. Arafat charged these countries with trying to push "our faithful friend the Soviet Union" from the diplomatic stage.

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Somewhat ironically, the Syrians as well as the Soviets were now becoming more interested in promoting PLO-Jordanian cooperation. As has been seen above, the Soviet aim was to ensure that the Geneva Conference could convene once disengagement talks had failed. The Syrians, for their part, reportedly hoped to demonstrate to the Egyptians that there was some hope left for a unified Arab

In an effort to offset Kissinger's projected trip to the Middle East in February, the Soviets requested in late January that Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko visit Damascus and Cairo immediately. His visit to Damascus from 1 to 3 February resulted in a communique calling for resumption of the Geneva talks not later than February or early March.

Soviet use of the Palestinian issue to put pressure on the Egyptians was also demonstrated during Gromyko's visit to Damascus. In a speech on 2 February, Gromyko again shifted terminology in referring to Palestinian objectives, stating that the USSR supports guarantees for the legitimate rights of the Palestinians in accord with their national aspirations "up to and including the creation of their own state (*gosudarstvo*)."^{25X1} Previous references had been to either statehood (*gosudarstvennost'*) or a national home (*ochag*). "State" appears to be the least vague of the various terms and thus suggests a more precise Soviet commitment than the others.*

These Soviet efforts to use the PLO to pressure the Egyptians to pull out of disengagement talks and proceed instead to Geneva were for the time being unsuccessful. Gromyko's visit to Egypt was a failure. While the final communique called for immediate resumption of the Geneva Conference, no time was specified, and Egypt did not renounce the disengagement talks.

While Gromyko's use of "state" did not commit the Soviets to the ultimate Palestinian demand, it did constitute a subtle warning that the USSR could move in that direction. This warning was conveyed more strongly in a *Za Rubezhom* article signed to the press in late February 1975. The article was by I. Belyayev, long-time Middle East correspondent for *Pravda*. In it he professed to see support among some Israelis for creation of "a democratic Palestine, that is, the adoption of the same proposal which Y. Arafat made in the United Nations." Belyayev went on to discuss establishment of a "national administration" on the West Bank (apparently a temporary solution similar to the Palestinians' "national authority"). This combination of phrasing and implied potential support for Arafat's "democratic Palestine" constitutes a possible indicator of the direction in which Soviet policy might evolve after establishment of a Palestinian West Bank state. Arafat's formula, of course, assumed the eventual abolition of the state of Israel.



Figure 9. Fahmy and Gromyko Fail to Reconcile Differences

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[REDACTED]

The Palestinians meanwhile remained extremely concerned about Egyptian intentions following Gromyko's visit to Cairo, and they were not appeased by Egyptian efforts to soothe them. Their anxiety was exacerbated by Sadat's statement in February to a *Washington Post* editor that Egypt was prepared to accept the internationalization of Jerusalem as an alternative to return of the Arab sector to the Arabs. On 26 February the PLO Executive Committee issued a strong statement, charging that the idea of a partial settlement on the Sinai front was aimed at trading some Arab land for the entire Arab cause and calling on all Arabs to resist this plot.*

However, in the face of Sadat's furious reaction to this statement, the PLO leadership retreated, denying any intention to insult Egypt and emphasizing the need to preserve Egyptian-Palestinian relations. This retreat undoubtedly resulted from Palestinian awareness of the high political and economic costs to the PLO of a rupture with the Egyptians and, by extension, with the Saudis. But the danger of a breakdown in relations had been close and had demonstrated the depth of Palestinian concern about disengagement talks.

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As Palestinian relations with Egypt deteriorated in February, relations with the Soviets appeared to get warmer.

[REDACTED] throughout February Soviet Ambassador Soldatov held frequent consultations with PLO officials in Beirut. And in early March a PLO official was finally named to head the PLO office in Moscow; this appointment had been pending since the previous summer. At about the same time, on 7 March, a Soviet-Algerian trade union joint communique issued in Algiers stated that the Soviet and Algerian sides considered the PLO the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinians. This was the first official Soviet document to contain such a reference and suggested a strengthening of Soviet political backing for PLO positions.

While thus courting the Palestinians, the Soviets appeared to be pursuing a dual policy on the point at issue between Egypt and the PLO. On the one hand, they continued to criticize disengagement talks and urge resumption of the Geneva Conference. Thus a 4 March *Radio Peace and Progress* broadcast endorsed the PLO 26 February attack on the Sinai negotiations and repeated the charge that the planned partial settlement was aimed at dividing the Arabs, disrupting a general settlement, and avoiding a just solution of the Palestinian problem.

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[REDACTED] This modification in line may have been based on a belief that the USSR was now limited in its ability to head off a disengagement agreement and was faced with the prospect of appearing to be a frustrated obstructionist if the talks succeeded. In addition, the Soviets may have anticipated that following disengagement talks, successful or not, negotiations would in fact be more likely to move to Geneva, where they could play a key role in formalizing any accords.

Even before the failure of disengagement talks in March 1975, the Soviets acted on their apparent belief that Geneva talks could resume shortly. So-

viet Ambassador Vinogradov, head of the Soviet delegation to the Geneva Conference, arrived in Jordan on 10 March; the visit was arranged on short notice and its purpose was reportedly two-fold—to improve strained Soviet-Jordanian relations and to convince the Jordanians to attend the Geneva Conference. However, Vinogradov had nothing to offer the Jordanians in exchange, as the Soviets remained unwilling to retreat from their endorsement of PLO claims to speak for the West Bank.* Husayn maintained his refusal to go to Geneva, stating that Jordan's presence would depend on an Arab decision to reverse the Rabat resolution eliminating Jordan from the negotiations.

The Soviet effort to persuade Jordan to participate in Geneva deliberations was undoubtedly a result of concern that prospects for the conference were uncertain without a solution to the question of Palestinian representation. The Soviets certainly realized that Israel would not deal directly with the PLO and now hoped that some Jordanian-PLO accommodation could be reached so that an acceptable delegation could be formed. The move was also supportive of Syrian efforts to mend fences with Jordan and to persuade the Jordanians to go to Geneva, possibly as part of a unified Arab delegation;

The Palestinians may well have been concerned by the Soviet gesture towards Jordan, seeing it as a possible retreat from full Soviet backing for the PLO's position with respect to Palestinian representation and as a form of pressure on them to moderate their own stand.

**A report published in a Jordanian newspaper during Vinogradov's visit to the effect that the Soviets now recognized Jordanian authority to represent the West Bank was clearly not valid, and may have been placed there by Husayn in order to embarrass Soviet relations with the PLO.*

The Soviets did give several signals during this period that they would like the PLO to modify its position in order to prepare for Geneva talks.

Furthermore, the Arafat visit to Moscow, originally proposed for some time in March, was subsequently postponed until at least late April. While urging the Palestinians to moderate their behavior, the Soviets continued to endorse Palestinian claims, however; a 26 March Soviet-Gambian communique stressed the Palestinian right to create an independent Palestinian state—the first official use of this terminology since early February.

While Soviet policies thus appeared somewhat ambivalent in early April, the attempts to persuade Jordan to participate in Geneva talks and to achieve some moderation in the PLO posture clearly reflected Moscow's interest in seeing negotiations begin in Geneva. With prospects for Geneva sharply increased as a result of the breakdown in disengagement talks, Soviet efforts to downplay inter-Arab contradictions and move all the essential actors into the Geneva forum seemed certain to continue.

III. SOVIET EFFORTS TO MANIPULATE THE PLO

In order to advance their general policy in the Middle East, the Soviets have repressed their distaste for the PLO's political ties with conservative Arabs and their reservations about Arafat's philosophy. While accepting the necessity of strengthening relations with Arafat and the PLO, they have tried to establish their own influence over the organization and bolster those forces within it with which they are sympathetic.

On the one hand, the Soviets have provided the PLO with limited military assistance and training and have promised more, obviously seeing such aid,

The Soviets decided during the early 1970's to provide the Palestinians with fairly limited quantities of small arms, funneled primarily through Syria. This arrangement theoretically solved two problems. It enabled the Soviets to get credit for the assistance but still disclaim responsibility for having provided arms directly. And it satisfied Syria by giving it control of the arms shipments and thus a measure of authority over the Palestinians.

The military assistance intended for the fedayeen which has been supplied by the USSR, and by several East European states as well, has been limited to light weapons, including rifles and ammunition, grenades and grenade launchers, and some medium-caliber rockets.

More sophisticated weapons being used by the Palestinians, specifically the Soviet-made Strela (SA-7) surface-to-air missiles do not appear to have been initially intended for the Palestinians by the USSR.* However, since the early summer of 1974, Palestinian forces in southern Lebanon have used these missiles against Israeli aircraft. The Soviets have clearly not had control over the distribution of these weapons and the Syrians and Libyans have been responsible for their supply.

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All the Soviet military assistance intended for the Palestinians appears to have been motivated by a desire to establish the USSR's political credentials with respect to the Palestinian movement; it has not been extensive enough to have a significant military impact, although it has certainly contributed to the Palestinians' ability to conduct small operations and thus maintain tension. The Soviets have undoubtedly hoped to establish themselves as the friend of the Palestinians and a source of potential major aid, in order to gain influence and insure their future position with a Palestinian entity.

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B. Political Maneuvering Within the PLO

1. Endorsement of the PDFLP

While working to strengthen their influence over the entire PLO and its leadership, the Soviets have also tried to bolster the PDFLP and use it to advance Soviet interests within the PLO. Soviet support for the PDFLP has been strictly political and there is no evidence that preferential material assistance has been given.

The PDFLP is described by its leader, Nalf Hawatmah, as a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist party. This organization takes the position that the Palestinian struggle is inseparable from the "liberation struggle" in the rest of the world, and it has called for the destruction of "imperialist interests" and reactionary regimes in the Middle East. While radical ideologically, the PDFLP is less indiscriminate

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Figure 11. PDFLP Leader Naif Hawatmah

in its use of terror than the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) from which it split in 1969. It has shied away from the use of international terror, although it has conducted terror operations within Israel, including the famous Maalot and Bet Shean incidents.

In the post-October war period, the PDFLP has backed the Arafat faction within the PLO in its struggles with the Rejection Front. The PDFLP is reportedly prepared, like Arafat, to entertain the concept of a Palestinian entity embracing the West Bank and Gaza, and it has not dismissed the possibility of a negotiated settlement. However, PDFLP spokesmen have been more outspoken than Arafat in criticizing Egypt's participation in US-backed negotiations and in advocating complete Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territory rather than piecemeal disengagement accords. It is thus closer to the USSR on this issue than Arafat.

PDFLP cooperation with Arafat within the PLO has been largely keyed to its own survival; the PDFLP has had little backing from Arab countries* and has received financial and military supplies through the PLO. At the same time it has taken measures designed to bolster its own strength, primarily pushing the concept of a unified front composed of the PLO and leftist leaders on the West Bank, where it has tried to forge strong ties.

While Hawatmah, an East Bank Christian, would appear an unlikely candidate to lead such a coalition, from the Soviet point of view he is at the moment the strongest individual within the PLO framework with suitable leftist credentials. The Soviets have few alternatives. In 1970 they encouraged the Communist Parties of Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria to establish a Communist commando organization which would become part of the Palestinian movement and presumably be amenable to Soviet direction. Arafat managed to keep the organization outside the PLO, however, and thus prevented it from assuming a role in the movement. The Soviets have also maintained sporadic contact with George Habash, leader of the leftist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and reportedly still hope that he will come back into the PLO fold. However, his opposition to any negotiated settlement is too strong for Soviet liking and his political base has been weakened by his departure from PLO leadership organs. Hawatmah is currently, therefore, the USSR's best bet.

During 1974 several Soviet press articles indicated endorsement of the PDFLP's tactic of trying to establish a leftist front on the West Bank. An *Izvestiya* article of March 1974 supported the establishment on the West Bank of a new "patriotic political organization," the PDFLP-sponsored Palestine National Front. And a June 1974 issue of *Komsomolskaya Pravda* praised this organization and denied that it was being established as a rival to the PLO.

In recent years there have been reports that Hawatmah was meeting frequently, in fact more fre-

*Since November 1974, however, the PDFLP has reportedly received some assistance from Libya; this would help explain increasingly independent and militant statements by Hawatmah since that time.

quently than any other Palestinian leader, with the then Soviet Ambassador in Lebanon, Sarvar Azimov, who is said to have commented, "The PLO is our game and the PDFLP our player." However, the clearest evidence of Soviet sympathy came in November 1974, when Hawatmah led a PDFLP delegation to the USSR. The party itself interpreted its invitation as a victory for its revolutionary position and a sign that the Soviets would now conduct relations with the Palestinian movement on two levels—a general level, with the PLO, and a private level, with the PDFLP.

The Soviets probably hoped through this invitation to Hawatmah to reinforce the PDFLP's position at a time when the group feared it might be excluded from a meaningful role in a proposed Palestinian government-in-exile. Part of Hawatmah's objective during this visit was to get a promise of Soviet assistance in preventing Arafat's total domi-

nation of such a government. The visit was a success from that point of view, as the Soviets and PDFLP subsequently cooperated in opposing Arafat's policy.*

Signs of a growing Soviet-PDFLP friendship were also evident in early 1975. The Soviet press praised the PDFLP on the organization's sixth anniversary in late February, and there is some evidence that Moscow was using Hawatmah as a contact with Persian Gulf radicals and with South Yemen during this period. Hawatmah apparently felt strengthened by the relationship; in early 1975 he became increasingly self-assertive toward the PLO leadership, taking a more openly critical position regarding Egyptian policies and possibly helping to push Arafat in this direction.

2. Soviet Views on a Palestinian Government-in-Exile

PLO consideration of a government-in-exile reached a peak in late 1974 as the Palestinians' international fortunes rose. The idea had long been advocated by the Egyptians, who hoped that a respectable Palestinian political entity, which they visualized as distinct from the PLO and headed by a moderate Palestinian, would be able to negotiate with Israel. Arafat reportedly also favored formation of such an entity, controlled by the PLO but headed by a non-PLO Palestinian, which could draw the onus of negotiating with Israel away from the PLO. At the other end of the spectrum, the radical Palestinian groups forming the so-called Rejection Front opposed the concept, anticipating that it would be a first step toward negotiations.

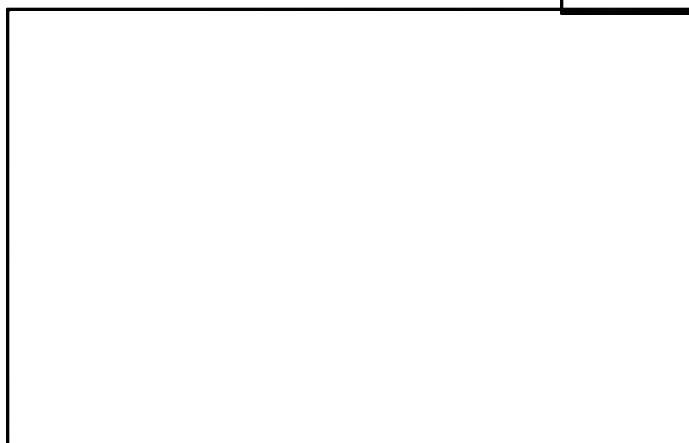
Before Hawatmah's visit to the USSR in November 1974, the Soviet position towards a government-in-exile had been passive. Soviet officials maintained that this was a matter for the Palestinians to decide and that, once they had decided, the USSR would support them. However, Hawatmah's concern that a provisional government including moderate, non-PLO Palestinians would undermine the PDFLP and other leftist groups was apparently shared by the Soviets.



Figure 12. Soviet Ambassador Azimov, "The PLO Is Our Game and the PDFLP Our Player"

*See next section.

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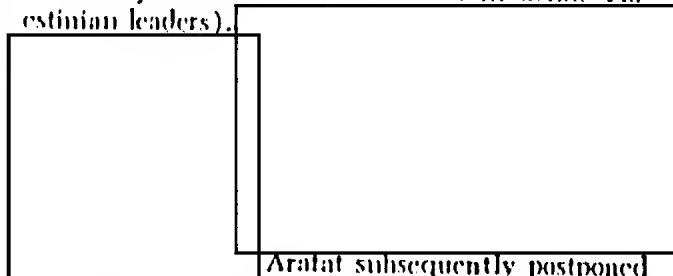


focus of negotiations at Geneva received a boost. The Soviets recognize the problems still impeding the convening of the Geneva Conference, particularly the problem of PLO participation, PLO rejection of UN Resolution 338, on which the conference is based, and Israel's refusal to meet with the PLO remain an obstacle to the meetings getting under way at all. The Soviets will undoubtedly continue to urge both Jordan and the Palestinians to attend the conference in order to force a decision upon Israel. Should Israel then refuse to attend the conference, the US could be blamed for failing to exert the necessary pressure. Similarly, the Soviets probably anticipate that, should the conference prove unsuccessful, the US will bear the onus for its inability to force Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories, as stipulated in UN Resolutions 242 and 338.

The Soviets and the PDFLP then cooperated to frustrate Arafat's plan for a provisional regime. Upon his return to the Middle East from Moscow, Hawatmah took the offensive, arguing that while the door was open for "declaration of a provisional Palestinian government," this must be a government "of a democratic and national nature," composed of Palestine resistance groups represented in the PLO and those in the National Front in the occupied territories (i.e., those leftist West Bank elements guided by the PDFLP rather than moderate Palestinian leaders).

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Arafat subsequently postponed the decision on a government-in-exile; according to one source he did not want to jeopardize Soviet political and military assistance.

This episode was a major success for Soviet policy towards the PLO. Soviet political and military assistance to the organization had been sufficient to give them some leverage with Arafat and his policies, and they had been able to use this leverage in behalf of the PDFLP. In addition, by forging stronger ties to the PDFLP, they had bolstered its position within the PLO.

IV. PROSPECTS

A. The Soviet View of Geneva

With the collapse of the March 1975 round of disengagement talks Soviet efforts to establish the

The question of how the conference should proceed once it is convened has thus far been of secondary importance to the Soviets. However, the USSR would certainly advocate resolutions which would be binding on all parties to the dispute and would provide a legal international basis for a settlement, thus again putting pressure on the US to force Israeli compliance. Specifically, the Soviets would push for adoption of their long-advocated objectives:

- *Israeli withdrawal from all territories occupied in 1967;*
- *Guarantees of the "legitimate national rights" of the Palestinians;*
- *Guarantees of the security of all states in the area, including Israel.*

They would presumably seek establishment of a Palestinian entity on the West Bank and in Gaza as fulfillment of the second objective.

While specific procedures for the Geneva Conference remain to be worked out, the Soviets obviously envision themselves involved in a major way in all stages and aspects of the meetings. This was indicated in their February 1975 communiqués with Syria and Egypt, calling for Soviet participation in all working groups in Geneva. In addition, the Soviets have indicated their willingness

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to share with the US the responsibility for guaranteeing a settlement, and they reportedly favor some permanent machinery for monitoring an agreement. Such ongoing participation would fulfill their original objective for Geneva—the extension and formalization of the USSR's role as a major power in the Middle East.

B. Soviet Calculations About a Palestinian State

1. Borders and Territorial Ambitions

As indicated earlier, the Soviets have called consistently for Israeli withdrawal from all territories occupied in 1967, but have also formally recognized Israel's right to exist and downplayed Palestinian claims to territories beyond those occupied in 1967. However, there have been periods when the Soviets have hedged a bit and suggested that Israel's borders might be cut back beyond the 1967 lines to the boundaries proposed in the 1947 UN Partition Plan. Three articles taking that tack appeared in authoritative Soviet publications in 1974, and all were published during periods of increased Soviet support for the Palestinian cause in general.*

Furthermore, upon occasion, the Soviets have privately indicated sympathy for the ultimate Palestinian goal of establishing a secular state in all of Palestine.

February 1975 *Za Rubezhom* article by the aforementioned Igor Belyayev. In this article Belyayev referred to support among some Israelis and American Jews for the idea of creating a democratic Palestinian state as proposed by Arafat in his UN speech. Soviet public statements had previously ignored this aspect of Arafat's speech, as it implicitly entails the destruction of the state of Israel; Belyayev's treatment of the concept gives it new status as a recognizable possibility.

It therefore seems likely that the Soviets will continue to construct a framework permitting movement in their policy towards increased endorsement of Palestinian claims to territory beyond the 1967 lines. This would give them flexibility in the future; however, they will probably not shift position noticeably in the current situation as this would weaken their credibility as mediator and settlement monitor.

In the longer term, should a Palestinian state be established on the West Bank and in Gaza, there seems little to prevent the Soviets from openly backing Palestinian claims to the territory granted them in the UN Partition Plan of 1947. Soviet relations with Israel are likely to remain poor, and the Soviets will continue to direct their energies

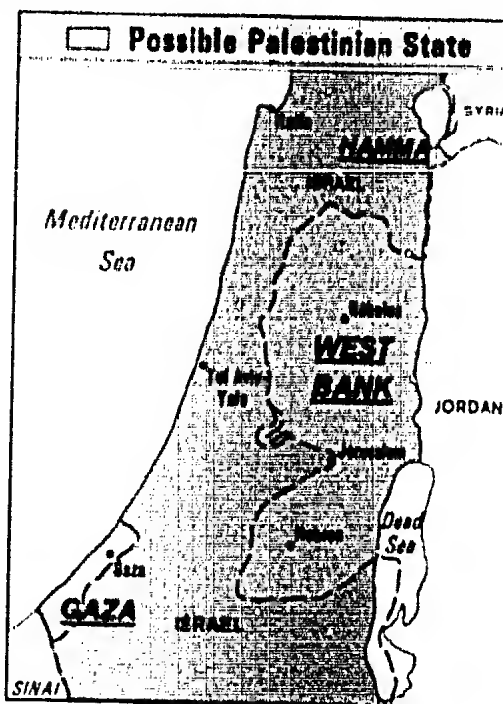


Figure 13.

The most recent indication of potential evolution in Soviet policy on this issue appeared in a late

**Izvestiya*, 9 July 1974; *Kommunist*, No. 13, signed to press 13 September 1974; *Izvestiya*, 22 December 1974.

towards increasing their strength in the Arab world. While they will probably remain committed to formal recognition of Israel's existence for the foreseeable future, they would have little hesitation in giving material and political assistance to a Palestinian state whose ultimate goal is the destruction of Israel.

2. Composition and Political Allegiance

The Soviets are well aware that the PLO under its present leadership is neither ideologically sympathetic to Communism nor politically oriented towards the socialist camp. They have tried to overcome this orientation by increasing their support to the PLO—and thereby increasing PLO dependence on the USSR. This tactic has had considerable success, as Arafat has become increasingly aware of the benefits of Soviet backing. However, the Soviets certainly realize that Arafat's tactics could change given a different set of circumstances.

The Soviets are also well aware of the high degree of instability within the Palestinian movement

and the vulnerability of Arafat's position. They can be expected to continue their efforts to bolster those forces within the PLO, specifically the PDFLP, which more closely approximate the Soviet model of a revolutionary vanguard than does Arafat's faction, and they undoubtedly hope that a leftist coalition will move into a position of dominance in a future Palestinian state.

However, the Soviets could live with Arafat if necessary and would gear their efforts to binding a future Palestinian state, whatever its political complexion, to the USSR. They probably hope that any such state, squeezed between a hostile Israel and a suspicious Jordan, would look to Moscow for military and economic assistance. Furthermore, a Palestinian state would inevitably be a source of tension in the region and would offer continuing justification for Soviet assistance and involvement. The Soviets will therefore remain willing to encourage formation of a Palestinian state on the West Bank and in Gaza no matter what its composition and will lend assistance to such a state once it is established.

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GLOSSARY

MAJOR PALESTINIAN GROUPS

Fatah—Largest and most influential of Palestinian fedayeen organizations. Headed by Yasser Arafat. Has received assistance from various Arab states, but strongest ties have been to more conservative states—Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

Fedayeen—"Men of Sacrifice"; term includes all Palestinian commandos in the various groups.

Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)—Umbrella organization including major fedayeen groups as well as independent civilian Palestinian organizations. Dominated by 12-man Executive Committee chaired by Yasser Arafat.

Palestine National Front—West Bank Palestinian organization, established after the October 1973 war. Pledges loyalty to PLO but is sponsored by the PDFLP (see below) and has leftist orientation.

Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDFLP)—Fedayeen group of Marxist-Leninist orientation, headed by Naif Hawatmah. Has remained on good terms with Arafat and PLO leadership, but has taken increasingly independent line in past year. Growing political ties to USSR.

Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)—Marxist-Leninist fedayeen group headed by George Habbash. Rejects any negotiated settlement and calls for continuation of armed struggle until all of Palestine is reclaimed. A major proponent of international terror tactics.

Rejection Front—Grouping of intransigent fedayeen organizations opposed to any compromises with Israel and committed to continued armed struggle. Composed of PFLP, the Iraqi-backed Arab Liberation Front, and several other small splinter groups. Supported by Iraq and Libya.

Salqa—Syrian-controlled fedayeen organization. Second in size to Fatah; headed by Zuhayr Muhsin.